

# American Community Survey Fact Sheet

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America is changing, and so is the census. In January 2005, a sample of housing unit addresses nationwide began receiving questionnaires from the new American Community Survey each month. The survey collects demographic, socio-economic and housing data – the same type of information that has been collected every 10 years from the long-form questionnaire of the census, which the American Community Survey will replace.

By 2010 — sooner for more populous areas — American communities will no longer need to wait 10 years for an up-to-date statistical “snapshot.” Instead, the American Community Survey will provide an annual moving picture of community characteristics. Elected officials, community leaders and businesses will have access to current data to address a wide range of current social and economic issues — a more efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

## WHAT?

- **WHAT IT IS.** The American Community Survey is a nationwide survey designed to give communities current and accurate information every year about their demographic, socio-economic and housing characteristics.
- **WHAT IT IS NOT:** The American Community Survey does *not* provide an official population count between censuses. American Community Survey data are designed to show the characteristics of the nation's population and should not be used as actual population counts or housing totals for the nation, states or counties. The Census Bureau's official population estimates, including population by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin, are released annually, as are the official estimates of total housing units.
- **SHORT FORM-ONLY CENSUS.** The American Community Survey is scheduled to replace the long form in the ten-year census beginning in 2010. From that time on, censuses will consist of a short form only. This is expected to result in operational efficiencies and anticipated higher response rates.
- **QUALITY TESTING.** The American Community Survey has been tested since 1996 to ensure that it will yield the same high-quality data as the census long form.
- **QUESTIONS.** There are more than 60 questions on the American Community Survey, and they are comparable to those on the Census 2000 long form. Questions are required by federal law, federal regulations and court decisions.

- **WHERE THE QUESTIONS COME FROM.** Every question on the American Community Survey is required to manage or evaluate public programs or to conduct the survey. For background information on each question, go to the ACS Media Toolkit, accessible from the ACS Web page (<http://www.census.gov/acs>).

- **CONFIDENTIALITY.** Protecting the confidentiality of survey respondents is the Census Bureau's highest priority. All individual census answers are anonymous and confidential. Any Census Bureau employee who violates their oath of confidentiality is subject to a prison term, a fine, or both.

## WHO?

- **RECIPIENTS.** In the United States and Puerto Rico, about 250,000 addresses per month, or 2.5 percent of the population per year, receive the survey. This is equal to about one-in-480 addresses a month, or one-in-40 a year. During Census 2000, about one-in-six addresses received the long form. Group quarters were NOT included in data prior to 2006. Group quarters include correctional facilities, college dormitories, nursing homes, military housing, shelters and more. See "Group Quarters" under "How to Use the Data" in the ACS Web page (<http://www.census.gov/acs>) for a complete listing.

- **SMALLER AREAS.** A larger proportion of addresses in small governmental units (American Indian reservations, small counties and towns) receive the survey. The monthly sample size is designed to approximate the ratio used in Census 2000, requiring more intensive distribution in these areas.

- **MINIMIZING BURDEN.** The odds of receiving the American Community Survey in any 10-year period are less than 1-in-4. No address will receive the survey more than once in any five-year period.

## WHERE?

- **LOCATIONS.** The American Community Survey is in all 3,141 counties, American Indian reservations, Alaska Native tribal areas, and Hawaiian homelands in the United States. The Puerto Rico Community Survey is conducted throughout the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

## WHEN?

- **START.** The full nationwide mailout began in January 2005, with a new mailing each successive month.

- **RESULTS.** Annual single-year results are available for areas with populations of 65,000 or more. Three-year estimates for areas with populations of 20,000 or more will be available in 2008, and five-year estimates will be available for all areas — down to the census tract and block group level — by 2010. This schedule is based on the time it will

take to collect data from a sample size large enough to produce accurate results for different size geographic units.

## WHY?

- **TEN YEARS IS TOO LONG FOR COMMUNITIES TO WAIT FOR CURRENT DATA.** With the American Community Survey, communities will have current information to assess local needs, such as where to build new roads, schools or senior centers. The survey also will help ensure that communities get their fair share of government and business funding.
- **CURRENT DATA ARE CRITICAL.** Every year, more than \$300 billion in federal funds are awarded to localities based on census numbers.
- **TIMELINESS IS MONEY.** The American Community Survey can help communities avoid making costly mistakes — such as building an elementary school, road or senior facility in the wrong place.
- **IMPROVING THE 2010 CENSUS.** The American Community Survey also will improve census operations by streamlining address updates and allowing the 2010 Census to focus on its constitutionally mandated purpose: counting the population.
- **AUTHORITY.** The American Community Survey is part of the 10-year census. As such, its legal authority derives from the same statutes that authorize the census: Title 13 of the U.S. Code, Sections 141 and 193. As with the 10-year census, responding to the American Community Survey is mandatory.

## HOW?

- **RESPONSES AND FOLLOW-UP.** Surveys are mailed every month to a random sample of addresses in each county. If a household does not respond in six weeks, Census Bureau staff will attempt to contact the respondent by telephone to complete the survey. If that, too, fails, a sample of the remaining addresses will be visited by Census Bureau staff for an in-person interview.
- **FOLLOW-UP COSTS.** The cost to taxpayers of a follow-up interview for households that do not mail back their completed questionnaires is up to 10 times greater than the cost of processing questionnaires received by mail.

For more information, visit the American Community Survey Web page at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www>.

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